

Part 536.0 - General

536.00 Introduction

This part describes planning policy with owners and users of forestland and agricultural producers using agroforestry technology.

536.01 Planning Policies

(a) General

General Manual 180, Part 409 - Planning Policy establishes NRCS policy that guides NRCS employees as they provide assistance to clients for planning and implementing resource conservation plans.

The NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook provides guidance on the “how to” of the planning process as related to the planning policy established by the General Manual

The National Forestry Manual provides NRCS policy for forestland resource conservation planning (forestry and agroforestry).

The General Manual 450, Part 401- Technical Guides establishes NRCS Field Office Technical Guide policy. The local Field Office Technical Guide contains the technical information needed to assist clients in the development and application of conservation plans. It contains general resource information about the field office area, soil and site information, quality criteria to be met in the Resource Management Systems (RMS's), guidance documents depicting the resource management planning thought process, practice standards for all practices applicable to the local field office area, and examples of the Conservation Effects Decision Making Process.

(b) Forestry Planning Policy

The success of the forestry phase of the conservation program depends on the landowner considering forestland a part of the total operating unit. To give forested areas the same consideration and attention that is given to any other land use, the land owner or operator needs a plan that provides:

- A system for managing the forest that is consistent with and coordinated with other farm or ranch operations.

- An annual or periodic income in accordance with owner's objectives.
- Other values such as erosion control, recreation, wildlife habitat, forage production, and environmental enhancement.

In addition to forest land, a client's other land uses (e.g., cropland, pasture, wildlife land) benefit from the use of forest-based practices typically referred to as “agroforestry.” These include such practices as Alley Cropping, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment, Riparian Forest Buffer and Silvopasture Establishment. Planners working with clients must consider the use of these practices in management systems to achieve land and water quality criteria documented in the local Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

A number of planning tools are available for use. Examples that may be used by planners include but are not limited to: Water Erosion Prediction Procedure - Forest Service Interface (currently at <http://forest.moscowfsl.wsu.edu/fswepp/>), various regional and local forest and understory growth simulation models, economic analyses models and spreadsheets, wildlife habitat evaluation guides, and visual assessment protocols such as Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (currently available at <ftp://ftp.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/downloads/wqam/svapfnl.pdf>). NRCS leadership anticipates and encourages the use of documented models and procedures during conservation planning in determining benchmark conditions and the effects of alternatives and decisions. At a minimum, use of such models and procedures must be documented in the form of an NRCS state technical note or equivalent document. The technical note need not repeat the procedure in its entirety if the procedure contains adequate usage information, limitations, etc. In other words, the note or equivalent document may provide only a brief background and a direct reference to the procedure.

(c) Providing Forestry Planning Assistance

When agreements have been developed (see Exhibit 535-1), NRCS personnel are authorized to provide forestry services beyond the normal assistance in conservation planning. Besides giving assistance on erosion control measures, properly trained personnel may provide cooperative assistance on the following:

- servicing cost-shared forestry practice referrals
- limited tree marking
- common insect and disease control methods
- location of logging roads.

Estimating timber volume should be avoided. Nevertheless, there may be occasions when volume estimates are needed to establish cutting cycles for planning purposes. Also, estimating tree volume on a few individual trees for demonstration activities is acceptable.

NRCS supports and encourages prescribed burning on rangeland, pastureland, forest land, hayland, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land, and wildlife land to meet specific resource management objectives. The NRCS policy on prescribed burning on grazing lands is in appendix A of this handbook. The national standard for prescribed burning is in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices. In states where prescribed burning on forestland is an acceptable practice, NRCS involvement is limited to planning assistance.

536.02 Objectives

NRCS assists people to make informed management decisions regarding their natural resources. Management considerations normally include information on the current and desired conditions of the soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources. Information is also provided on human resources and values such as; recreation potential, cultural values, economic viability, and aesthetic values.

536.03 Planning Procedures

Refer to the National Forestry Handbook, Part 636.1 for detailed forestry and agroforestry planning procedures.